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**Citizen board urges legislators to make room for 52,500 additional college students by 2010**

**OLYMPIA** — State budget writers should make it a priority to fund an additional 52,500 full-time college students by 2010, a citizen board told the Senate Ways and Means committee today.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), the state's higher education planning agency, told the Senate committee that population growth alone would account for about 70 percent -- or 36,000 -- of the new college students. In addition, according to HECB Executive Director Marc Gaspard, if the state is to meet the escalating demand for high skills in new and growing professions, it should invest in an additional 16,500 "full-time equivalent" students.

To achieve the Master Plan goal, state-funded enrollment would need to increase by 2.5 percent per year. Total state-funded student enrollment authorized in 2001 is 209,000. The statement of enrollment need is included in the recent HECB 2000 Master Plan for Higher Education, now before the Legislature for adoption.

Recent surveys by the American Electronics Association and the Washington Software Alliance found that employers are importing the highly skilled employees they need in the booming software and biomedical fields. Those findings were confirmed by a HECB study, which included new analysis by the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics showing that the fastest growing professions are those that require a two-year college degree or better.

Called before the Senate budget-writing committee to review the HECB recommendations on enrollment need, Gaspard emphasized that the 52,500 number is conservative.

“That number doesn’t include the students educated by the 277 e-learning providers that we know are ‘beaming’ degree programs into the state. Nor does it fully include the students expected to attend the state’s 82 non-public colleges and universities,” said Gaspard, adding that Washington students at some of those institutions depend upon state-funded financial aid to get through school.

The 2000 Master Plan outlines strategies for meeting the cost of the additional FTEs, noting that because all will benefit from a better educated state, all should share responsibility for making the investment in education:

- **Colleges and universities must operate smarter and better**, shifting no less than 1 percent of their state funding per year from lowest to highest priorities through 2010 (\$102.1 million reinvested annually by 2010);
- **Students must come prepared to do college-level work**, with the average freshman beginning school with a quarter of college credit (\$59.3 million saved annually by 2010);
- **Business should support higher education through cash and in-kind support**, e.g. loaned faculty/facilities (\$65.3 million annually by 2010);
- **Students and families should be prepared to pay their fair share of the cost of education**, with tuition levels linked to growth in state personal income (\$65.3 additional revenue annually by 2010); and
- **The state should continue to invest in the building blocks of higher education opportunity**: enrollment and financial aid, growing its real general fund investment in higher education by 1.5 percent over the next nine years (\$338.6 million additional annual investment by 2010).

“It’s the job of our Board to make the case for the need; the Legislature has the tough job of setting spending priorities,” said Gaspard, himself a former Senate Majority Leader. “We believe there is no better investment than education – particularly when a college degree has essentially become the ticket to full participation in middle-class life.”

State law requires that the HECB submit a Master Plan for higher education to the Legislature every four years. Once the document is adopted by the Legislature, it becomes the state’s strategic higher education plan.

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